

# Early Christian Govan: the Historical Context

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The rich and varied collection of early Christian stones preserved originally in the kirkyard and now within the parish kirk of Govan has received a number of notices, mostly from art historians.<sup>1</sup> These have been concerned mainly to set the stones in an artistic context, and have paid relatively little attention to their setting within the context of ecclesiastical or political history. Art, however, never exists in a vacuum, and these works of art must have been executed for religious and political reasons; the whole "Govan school" of stonecarving must have stood in an historical context. The purpose of this study is to explore that context in view of the probable date and geographical distribution of the carvings of the Govan school.

At Govan itself there is the largest collection of carved stones, but what survives is probably only a fraction of what was there originally. The survivals include a stone sarcophagus, two shafts of free-standing crosses, two upright cross-slabs, five hogback tombstones, and a large number of recumbent cross-slabs; together with fragments, there are over forty items in all. It is known that the surviving sarcophagus was originally one of three sarcophagi at Govan, but the other two were destroyed in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> At Inchinnan there is a group second in importance to that at Govan, consisting of a sarcophagus-cover, a cross-shaft, and a recumbent cross-slab. Cross-shafts have also been found at Arthurlie, Cambusnethan, Kilwinning, Lochwinnoch, Capelrig, Old Kilpatrick and Mountblow (this one may have come from Old Kilpatrick); and complete crosses at Barochan and Cadzow. There are recumbent slabs at Dumbarton and stones with incised crosses at Luss. Luss also has a hogback tombstone, as does Dalserf. A

<sup>1</sup> C. A. R. Radford, "The Early Christian Monuments at Govan and Inchinnan", *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society*, n.s., xv (1966), 173-88; J. R. Allen, *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, iii (1903), 462-72; J. Stirling Maxwell, *Sculptured Stones in the Kirkyard of Govan* (Glasgow, 1899); J. Stuart, *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (1856-67), i, pl. 136, 137.

<sup>2</sup> Radford, "Early Christian Monuments", 174.

fragment of a sarcophagus has been found at Kilmahew.<sup>3</sup> The stones of Bute, Cumbrae and Roseneath do not appear to belong to the Govan school. Geographically, the school is localised within a radius of Govan, covering the lower Clyde valley and extending north as far as Luss, south-west to Kilwinning, and south-east to Dalserf.

The artistic features, influences, and probable date of the stones have been discussed by Radford and others, so it is not necessary to do more than summarise their conclusions here. The most common form of abstract ornament is interlaced panels, much of it repetitive and naïve, some of it botched; it is often of "double-beaded" type. There is also some "ring-twist" pattern and some more complex knots. There is a little key-pattern, a few swastikas and swastika-like designs, and a few spirals. There are two or three serpent bosses. Figure sculpture takes the form mainly of horsemen riding from right to left across the upright slabs, but there are some other human figures as well: a crucifix on the Lochwinnoch cross; a standing figure at the top of the cross-head at Cadzow; Daniel in the den of lions on the Inchinnan sarcophagus; and a scene, possibly of the presentation in the temple, on the cross-shaft at Cambusnethan.<sup>4</sup> The free-standing crosses were not typical Anglian crosses, which usually had a squarish section, but had a slab-like section like the crosses of the Iona school. Barochan cross has an unpierced ring, and the same was once true of the Lochwinnoch cross. The cross at Inchinnan had a ring, but it cannot now be determined whether the ring was pierced or not. In most other cases, it is no longer certain whether the cross had a ring or not; but only the crude and debased Cadzow cross definitely did

<sup>3</sup> Mostly described in *ECMS*, iii; see also I. MacIvor, *Dumbarton Castle* (HMSO, 1981?): Radford, "Early Christian Monuments", *passim*; C. A. R. Radford, "The Early Church in Strathclyde and Galloway", *Medieval Archaeology*, xi (1967), 105-26, esp. 116-17; J. B. Stevenson, *The Clyde Estuary and Central Region: Exploring Scotland's Heritage* (HMSO, 1985); J. T. Lang, "Hogback Monuments in Scotland", *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, cv. (1972-4), 206-35; J. J. Waddell, "An Early Grave Slab in Dalserf Churchyard", *Transactions of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society*, vii (1921-4), 19-21; *Archaeological and Historical Collections Relating to the County of Renfrew* (Paisley, 1890). The Capelrig Cross-shaft is now housed in the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove.

<sup>4</sup> The drawing of the Mountblow Cross-shaft in *ECMS*, iii shows the horseman riding from left to right, but it has in fact been reproduced the wrong way round, as well as being inaccurate in other respects. I am grateful to the staff of the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum for this information and for the opportunity to view this piece in their store. As for the figure scene on the Cambusnethan shaft, it is also possible that this represents the baptism of Christ in the Jordan; cf. the portrayal of this on the West Cross at Kells, H. S. Crawford, *Irish Carved Ornament* (Dublin, 1926, new edn. 1980), plates XLIII and XLIV, no. 138.

not. So the typical free-standing cross of the Govan school was a true "Celtic cross", slab-like in section, with small tightly curving armpits, and sometimes at least with a small ring set within the curve of the armpits.<sup>5</sup>

The hogback stones do not share many of these characteristics. They have imitations of roof-tiles and sometimes zoomorphic terminals. This type of monument is much more common in the Danelaw and in north-west England than in Scotland; Govan has the largest group of these monuments found in Scotland, but they should perhaps not be regarded as the most typical productions of the Govan school.<sup>6</sup>

Stylistically, the Govan carvings represent a fusion of styles. The horsemen are often reminiscent of late Pictish sculpture, at Meigle and elsewhere. Only on the Govan sarcophagus is the rider part of a hunting scene; this would not be out of place on a late Pictish stone from Angus or Mearns. The beasts on the Inchinnan sarcophagus also suggest Pictish influence.<sup>7</sup> Serpent bosses are found at Iona, and at Nigg, St Andrews, and elsewhere in Pictland; Dr Henderson has shown that the serpent can represent resurrection to a new life by the way it sloughs off its old skin and comes out of it alive.<sup>8</sup> This is presumably the meaning of the serpent bosses on the Lochwinnoch cross and on a cross-slab at Govan; it may have been the intended meaning of a boss on the Cadzow cross, but the execution is too crude to allow for certainty. "Gaelic" influence may be shown in the shape of the "Celtic cross", if the cross-heads of Barochan, Inchinnan and Lochwinnoch were typical. On the other hand, Radford argues that the ring-twist and double-beaded interlace seem to derive from Anglian influences.<sup>9</sup> The hogback tombstones are Anglo-Scandinavian in form and execution.<sup>10</sup> Thus the school is eclectic in its influences, with "Pictish" horsemen and beasts, "Gaelic" ringed crosses, "Anglian" interlace and "Scandinavian" hogbacks.

<sup>5</sup> Radford ("Early Christian Monuments", 178), argues that the Govan cross-shafts supported Anglian-type crosses, like Ruthwell, Hoddom or Thornhill. In this he did not take account of the complete ring on the Barochan cross or the fragmentary rings on those at Inchinnan and Lochwinnoch. Since this paper was written I have also examined the Arthurlie cross-shaft, which stands now on a modern base within railings at Springhill Road, Barrhead; the stumps of a ring are clearly visible arising from within the curve of the lower armpits. These are not shown on the drawing in *ECMS*, iii.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. refs. in nn. 1 and 3 above, esp. Lang, "Hogback Monuments".

<sup>7</sup> Radford, "Early Christian Monuments", 176, 179, 182.

<sup>8</sup> I. Henderson, "The Book of Kells and the Snake-boss Motif on Pictish Cross-slabs and the Iona Crosses", *Ireland and Insular Art, AD 500-1200*, ed. M. Ryan (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 1987), 56-65.

<sup>9</sup> Radford, "Early Christian Monuments", *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-8; Lang, "Hogback Monuments", *passim*.



But it does not improve on any of the styles which it adopts, for much of the artwork of the Govan school is poor and provincial. Only the battered Barochan cross and the headless Govan cross-shafts show the Govan style at its best.

Turning to the question of date, most art historians regard the Govan school as a late development of early Christian art in Scotland. The wide range of influences involved tends to point to a late date, and the presence of the Anglo-Scandinavian hogbacks seems to confirm it. Most writers doubt if any of the Govan carvings could be much earlier than the late ninth century, and would date the bulk of the material, such as the upright cross-slabs, hogbacks, and recumbent slabs, to the tenth and eleventh centuries. The Barochan cross and two free-standing cross-shafts at Govan show a high quality of workmanship and variety of ornament which suggest that they may be among the earliest as well as the best productions of the school, and could belong to the late ninth century.<sup>11</sup> The Govan sarcophagus lags behind these in quality, but with its beasts and hunting scene with late Pictish parallels could not be too long after A.D. 900. The Inchinnan sarcophagus could be of similar date. Those stones with serpent-bosses, the Lochwinnoch and Cadzow crosses and the so-called "sun stone" cross-slab at Govan, could represent a late fashion. The large crucifix figure on the Lochwinnoch stone reminds one of the large figures which came to dominate Irish high crosses in the eleventh century and later<sup>12</sup>; while the debased interlace and general crudeness of the Cadzow and Govan examples is suggestive of decadence. The majority of the free-standing crosses, such as Old Kilpatrick, Mountblow, Inchinnan, Arthurlie, Capelrig and others, may come somewhere in the middle of the sequence, perhaps the tenth century. A tenth-century date has also been suggested for the Govan hogbacks<sup>13</sup>; but that date would seem to be too early for the romanesque arcading on the hogback at Luss, unless that decorative feature was added in the twelfth century to an earlier stone.

No single item of sculpture can be securely dated in absolute terms; these dates proposed and generally accepted by art historians are largely conjectural. But the Govan school as a whole must be later than the pre-Viking art of Iona, and the great Anglian crosses and fragments of Bewcastle, Ruthwell, Hoddom,

<sup>11</sup> Radford, "Early Christian Monuments", 179; "Typologically these . . . cross-shafts are among the earliest sculptures found at Govan." Stevenson, *Clyde Estuary and Central Region*, 106, suggests that Barochan is "probably early in the Strathclyde series and could be as early as the eighth century". The first part of this statement is probably correct, but few scholars would agree with the second part.

<sup>12</sup> F. Henry, *Irish High Crosses* (Dublin, 1964), 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Lang, "Hogback Monuments"; Radford, "Early Christian Monuments". 177.

Abercorn, Jedburgh and elsewhere. Probably it is later too than the crosses and other sculpture at St Andrews; these show a rich variety of abstract ornament, including scroll-foliage and key-pattern as well as interlace. Interlace tends to become increasingly the monotonous decorative feature of the Govan school.<sup>14</sup> Those items of Govan school art which show decorative motifs other than interlace, such as the Govan and Barochan crosses, are probably early in the sequence.

There seems to be no reason to doubt the generally accepted dates for the Govan school. The bulk of the material belongs to the tenth and eleventh centuries, with the possibility of some being slightly earlier and some slightly later.

The presence of a rich collection of sculpture of this date at a site which is totally absent from historical record presents something of a puzzle. It is particularly odd that no stones of this type have been found at Glasgow, which by tradition was the site of St Kentigern's church in the late sixth century and which in the twelfth was made the centre of the revived diocese of Strathclyde.<sup>15</sup> Jocelin of Furness in his *Vita Kentigerni* describes a great standing cross erected before the cathedral at Glasgow, but it is not certain from his words whether it was still standing in his day.<sup>16</sup> The suggestion that Govan rather than Glasgow was the true site of St Kentigern's church cannot now be accepted<sup>17</sup>; the site at Glasgow itself is so totally unsuited to the building of a great cathedral, calling forth marvellous ingenuity on the part of the architects and masons, that its use can only have been dictated by ancient and sacred associations. Besides, no item of the Govan school of stonecarving belongs to the period of the historical Kentigern (who died c. 614) or to a period of two and a half centuries after his death. There is then nothing at Govan to link it with St Kentigern's late sixth-century church, or to suggest that it was in existence until long thereafter.

The stonecarving tradition of Govan and its neighbours—Inchinnan and elsewhere in Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire—is continuous from the period of its emergence down to the time of the revival of Glasgow under David when he was lord of Strathclyde-Cumbria (c. 1113-1124). So there was an important religious centre on the site, presumably monastic, from

<sup>14</sup> See the descriptions cited in n. 3 above.

<sup>15</sup> On St Kentigern and his cult, see A. Macquarrie, "The Career of St Kentigern of Glasgow: *Vitae*, *Lectioes* and Glimpses of Fact", *Innes Review*, xxxvii (1986), 3-24, and works cited therein.

<sup>16</sup> Jocelin of Furness, *Vita Kentigerni*, in *Lives of SS Ninian and Kentigern*, ed. A. P. Forbes (Historians of Scotland, v, Edinburgh, 1874), cap. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Made, for example, in G. and A. Ritchie, *Scotland: Archaeology and Early History* (1981), 147.

about A.D. 900 or a little earlier down to the early twelfth century. There is no evidence to suggest that the church at Govan was in existence earlier, and indeed the absence of any sculpture of an earlier date can perhaps be taken as negative evidence to the contrary.

Two points emerge from this discussion which indicate the historical context in which the Govan carvings should be placed: first of all, the period was that in which Gaelic influence was being felt increasingly strongly in Strathclyde, and in which was beginning the process of incorporation into the united kingdom of Picts and Scots ruled by the dynasty of Kenneth mac Alpin. Second, for at least part of the time when Govan was flourishing Glasgow and the cult centre of Saint Kentigern were in eclipse, and soon after Glasgow's revival in the twelfth century Govan was subordinated to the status of a prebend of the cathedral.

Some account must be given of the political history of Strathclyde in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries. Before 756, the Strathclyde kings had jockeyed for power and territory with the Scots, Picts and Angles; at times they held a dominant position because of military successes, for example after the battle of Strathcarron in 642. But in the 750s the kingdom may have been weakened by a succession dispute following the death of Tewdwr map Beli c. 752; Tewdwr's successor Rhodri had a short reign before being succeeded by Dyfnwal map Tewdwr c. 754. In 756 Eadberht king of Northumbria and Onuist or Angus king of the Picts joined together to lead an army to the city of Dumbarton, which surrendered to them on 10 August. Ten days later, most of Eadberht's army was destroyed on its homeward march at a place called Ovania, possibly either the West Lothian or the Lanarkshire River Avon. This may have been as a result of treachery by Onuist, who according to an English source "from the beginning of his reign right to the very end perpetrated bloody crimes, like a tyrannical slaughterer"; it is unlikely that the newly defeated Britons could have mounted such a swift reprisal. Dyfnwal died, apparently in exile in Wales, in 760; the kingdom of Strathclyde disappears from historical record for nearly a century, apart from a note that Dumbarton was again sacked, probably by Picts or Angles, in 780.<sup>18</sup>

No record survives of the names of the kings of Strathclyde or the dates of their deaths between 760 and 872. All that survives is a

<sup>18</sup> Most of the sources are drawn together in A. O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History, AD 500-1286* (Edinburgh, 1922), and *ibid.*, *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers, AD 500-1286* (1908); the best modern account is A. P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (1984); cf. also D. P. Kirby, "Strathclyde and Cumbria", *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, lxii (1962), 77-94.



pedigree in a Welsh manuscript of a king who died in 878, which names the generations between him and Dyfnwal map Tewdwr who died in 760.<sup>19</sup> They were all presumably kings of Dumbarton, but not necessarily the only kings; and they are, with one exception, so obscure that they are not otherwise known. The exception is Arthgal map Dyfnwal, under whom the kingdom may have experienced a temporary and brief revival. It may have been under his leadership that the Britons burned Dunblane in 849, their first recorded aggressive exploit for nearly a century. But revival brought Dumbarton unwelcome attention, for in 870 Olaf and Ivar, kings of the Norse at Dublin, besieged the rock for four months and finally reduced it when they cut off the defenders' water supply. In 871 they returned to Dublin with much booty and many prisoners, including Arthgal, who was put to death in the following year "by counsel of Constantine mac Kenneth", king of Scots. Perhaps Olaf and Ivar had hoped for a ransom from Constantine for Arthgal, and been disappointed. Constantine's sister was, or subsequently became, married to Arthgal's son Rhun. If the marriage was being arranged or had already taken place, the death of Arthgal would have allowed Constantine to assume control of Strathclyde in the name of his brother-in-law. Rhun died c. 878. He is the last king named in the Welsh genealogy of the kings of Strathclyde, so that document constitutes his pedigree and probably dates from his time or soon after. The names of subsequent Strathclyde kings have to be assembled from other sources.<sup>20</sup>

The next of these is Eochaid map Rhun, the first Strathclyde king to bear a Gaelic name; his mother was a daughter of Kenneth mac Alpin. Accounts of his reign are confused. He may have ruled jointly with Giric son of Dungal (c. 878-889) and been expelled with him. According to the "Prophecy of Berchan", Eochaid was the first Briton to rule over the Gael; he is called *an Britt a Cluaide, mac inná o Dhún Guaire* (the Briton from the Clyde, son of the woman of Dun Guaire). The "prophecy" gives him a reign of thirteen years, and states that he was dispossessed by Mac Rath, "son of fortune", probably meaning Giric, who abased Britain and exalted Alba. Mac Rath is said to have had English, Norse and British as slaves in his house (that is, subject rulers?). The early annals in the *Chronicle of Melrose* describe Giric as very powerful, dominating [the north of] England.<sup>21</sup>

According to the late and unreliable *Brut y Tywysogion*, c. 890 "The men of Strathclyde, those that refused to unite with the

<sup>19</sup> E. Phillimore, "*Annales Cambriae* and Old Welsh Genealogies from Harleian MS 3859", *Y Cymmrodor*, ix (1888), 141-83, 172-73.

<sup>20</sup> See n. 18 above, esp. Anderson, *Early Sources*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

English, had to depart from their country and go into Gwynedd''; there they were settled by Anarawd, king of Gwynedd, whom they aided in defeating the Saxons.<sup>22</sup> It is doubtful how much reliance can be placed on this source, but if it can be trusted at all it is probable that we should rather understand that the Strathclyde aristocrats refused to unite with the Scots. There was no threat of an English takeover in Strathclyde at this stage, but a union with the kingdom of the Scots was a very present threat.<sup>23</sup>

The following is a tentative reconstruction of what may have happened. Constantine died in battle c. 878; Rhun died about the same time, possibly fighting in Constantine's army as a subject king. Eochaid map Rhun then attempted to assert his own kingship of Scots through his descent from Kenneth. He was ultimately unsuccessful, in the end accepting joint status with, or more likely subject status under, Giric until c. 889. In the latter year Giric was expelled by the Scots, and presumably Eochaid too; they were replaced by Constantine's own son Donald. The date of Eochaid's death is not recorded, nor is it known whether he led his war band into Gwynedd, or whether their supposed migration took place after his death. The migration of a group of discontented Strathclyde aristocrats into Gwynedd c. 890 could explain how the pedigree of Rhun map Arthgal came to be known in Wales; it could also help to explain the presence of the cult of Saint Kentigern in Gwynedd, most notable in the dedication to him at St Asaphs and in the inclusion of an episode about exile in Wales in Jocelin of Furness' *Vita Kentigerni*.<sup>24</sup> Many other traditions about the *Gwyr y Gogledd*, the "men of the North", are preserved in later Welsh literature, and some at least of them may owe their preservation to such a migration.

Another puzzle which could be explained by the migration of Strathclyde aristocrats into Wales in the late ninth century is the relative obscurity of the cult centre of St Kentigern at Glasgow for a considerable period before its revival by David c. 1113-1124. How long this period extended cannot be stated with certainty, though judging from the wording of David's *Inquisitio* it is unlikely to have been as long as 200 years plus.<sup>25</sup> However, the cause of Glasgow's decline into relative obscurity could have had its origin as far before as the late ninth century. It seems likely that the earliest *stratum* in Jocelin's *Vita*, which connects Kentigern with King Rhydderch map Tudwal, and has a seemingly very early account of

<sup>22</sup> Smyth, *Warlords*, 217-18.

<sup>23</sup> As well as sources and works cited in nn. 17 and 18, see also M. Miller, "Historicity and the Pedigrees of the Northcountrymen", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, xxvi (1976). 255-80.

<sup>24</sup> Macquarrie, "Career of St Kentigern", 14-15, and references cited therein.

<sup>25</sup> *Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis* (Edinburgh, 1843), no. 1.



his death and burial, had an eighth- or ninth-century Strathclyde source.<sup>26</sup> The pedigree of Rhun map Arthgal presumably came from a northern *scriptorium* as well. It is tempting to see both these documents, and perhaps others relating to the *Gwyr y Gogledd*, emanating from a *scriptorium* at Glasgow and being taken into Wales by exiles in the late ninth century. The exile of Strathclyde aristocrats who were patrons of Glasgow and devotees of St Kentigern could explain the beginnings of the obscurity of Glasgow, which is a phenomenon of whose existence we have good evidence for the eleventh century.<sup>27</sup>

After c. 890 some at least of the kings of Strathclyde were clients of the kings of Scots. Some of them, such as Donald son of Aed, can be identified as members of the Scottish royal dynasty. It has been argued that in the tenth century Strathclyde was held by the *tanaise* of heir designate of the king of Scots.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, others had British names, such as Ywain, Dyfnwallon, and possibly Rhydderch (if that is the correct reading of a corrupt form in Scottish sources). Ywain or Owen “the bald”, who died in 1018, served in Malcolm II’s army at the Battle of Carham in that year. On his death, Malcolm placed his own grandson Duncan on the throne as king of the Cumbrians, and he succeeded as king of Scots on his grandfather’s death in 1034.<sup>29</sup> One scholar has argued that the effective independence of the Strathclyde kingdom continued right up to this time.<sup>30</sup> The view of this writer, which will be argued in detail elsewhere, is that in the late ninth and early tenth centuries Strathclyde was under the political control of the Scottish kings of the dynasty of Kenneth mac Alpin, that later in the tenth century the old ruling dynasty of Strathclyde reasserted a measure of independence, and that this lasted until the time of Owen the Bald<sup>31</sup>; certainly it cannot be demonstrated that Strathclyde was always and without interruption held by the *tanaise* of the king of

<sup>26</sup> Macquarrie, “Career of St Kentigern”, 17-18, and references there cited.

<sup>27</sup> As well as the early documents in *Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis*, see modern commentary in J. Durkan, “The Bishops’ Barony of Glasgow in Pre-Reformation Times”, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, xxii (1986), 277-301, at 277-79.

<sup>28</sup> The sources are best found in Anderson, *Scottish Annals and Early Sources*; the argument about the *tanaise* is most strongly expressed by A. A. M. Duncan, “The Kingdom of the Scots”, in L. M. Smith, *The Making of Britain: The Dark Ages* (1984), 131-44, at 137. I am not sure that the practice of “tanistry” was as regular as Professor Duncan suggests, but it certainly did happen on occasion.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, *Early Sources and Scottish Annals*, *passim*, for the names of Dumbarton kings; for the succession to Owen the Bald, see *Annales Cambriae*, ed. J. W. Ab Ithel (RS, 20, 1860), s.a. 1015.

<sup>30</sup> Kirby, “Strathclyde and Cumbria” (see n. 18 above).

<sup>31</sup> This will be argued in “The Kings of Strathclyde, c. 400-1018”, in a collection of essays on Scottish medieval government and society to appear in 1991.

Scots. The practice was known, however, and was revived for Alexander's brother David c. 1113.<sup>32</sup>

The place of the Govan stonecarving in this picture should begin to emerge. We have seen that the church of St Kentigern at Glasgow was probably patronised by native British aristocrats of Strathclyde, who were displaced both by the great siege of Dumbarton in 870 and by subsequent upheavals, such as a possible migration of some of them into Gwynedd about twenty years later. They would appear to have taken the cult of St Kentigern and some materials from the *scriptorium* of Glasgow into Gwynedd. The migration of c. 890 must remain not proven; but of a major upheaval in Strathclyde during this period we can be in no doubt. Kentigern, as a British saint, would not have found favour with the Gaelic aristocrats settled in Strathclyde by the kings of Scots and their Strathclyde client kings; they gave their patronage instead to the cult of St Constantine at Govan. There is no doubt either than we can place the beginnings of the Govan school of stonecarving at this time of upheaval in the late ninth century.

This brings us to a consideration of the curious dedication at Govan, to St Constantine. It is not surprising to find Gaelic church names coming into Renfrewshire, Dunbartonshire and Lanarkshire, such as Kilbride, Kilmacolm, and Kilpatrick. Perhaps, indeed, the tradition that St Patrick was born in Strathclyde, at Old Kilpatrick near Dumbarton Rock, originated at this time when Gaels were settling in a British area; it first surfaces in the Irish *Vita Tripartita*, written c. 900.<sup>33</sup> It is perhaps more likely that in the case of Old Kilpatrick an existing dedication suggested the tradition, rather than *vice versa*. Govan, however, seems to have been the centre of the stonecarving school for this area, so it was probably the most active and important ecclesiastical centre, almost certainly monastic. But it is not dedicated to a notable Gaelic saint such as Brigid, Columba or Patrick, but to the obscure St Constantine.

The earliest mention of a British personage of this name is by Gildas, writing c. 540. He names the tyrant of Dumnonia (Devon and Cornwall) as Constantine, and accuses him of oath-breaking, sacrilege, murder, adultery and divorce, as well as less specific

<sup>32</sup> Ailred of Rievaulx, *De Bello Standardo*, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, cxcv, col. 709.

<sup>33</sup> *Tripartite Life of St Patrick*, ed. W. Stokes (RS, 1877), 8. A. Boyle, "The Birthplace of St Patrick", *Scottish Historical Review*, lx (1981), 156-60 argues that the dedication of Kilpatrick could have antedated Gaelic penetration, but offers no argument or evidence in support of this. His suggestion that Fintry in Strathendrick could be Muirchu's *Ventre* cannot be accepted, attractive though it is, because the final *f* of \**Venn-tref* was still pronounced in the twelfth century: W. J. Watson, *History of the Celtic Place-names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), 364.

wickedness.<sup>34</sup> The Irish and Welsh annals mention the *conversio* (that is, entry into religion) of a Constantine c. 590<sup>35</sup>; a gap of fifty years makes it unlikely that he was the same person, but quite possibly a member of the same family in which the name was common. Later tradition makes St Constantine a Cornish king who abdicated and entered a monastery in Ireland.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, later tradition also has several other explanations for St Constantine which cannot be reconciled easily. The *Martyrology of Óengus* places the feast of “Constantine the Briton” on 11 March. The scholiastic notes added to the same source call this person, rather inconsistently, “Constantine son of Fergus king of Alba”.<sup>37</sup> There was a king of Picts of this name who reigned c. 789-820. Since the *Martyrology* was probably compiled during his reign, c. 800, he cannot have been the person whose commemoration Óengus puts at 11 March. The scholiastic notes, however, were added much later and are of little historical value. They may have borrowed the patronymic from some other source, perhaps one of the Gaelic versions of the Pictish king list.

Jocelin of Furness in his *Vita Kentigerni* offers a different version of who St Constantine was. He states that he was the son of Rhydderch Hael map Tudwal. According to Jocelin, Rhydderch’s queen Languoreth was barren until Kentigern’s prayers made her conceive at an advanced age, and the resulting child was named Constantine.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that the story in the notes added to the *Martyrology of Óengus* is a garbled version of the same tradition; but it is unlikely that either should be given any historical weight. Rhydderch is not credited with any progeny in the Harleian manuscript genealogies, and the kingship of Strathclyde seems to have passed to other branches of his family.<sup>39</sup> Jocelin’s story reads like an attempt to claim St Constantine’s church as part of St Kentigern’s *paruchia*, which it was clearly not in David’s *Inquisitio* or in other early twelfth-century documents relating to Glasgow.<sup>40</sup> However, by the time Jocelin was writing in the late twelfth century Govan had been incorporated as a prebend of the cathedral, and he may have felt a need to offer an explanation.

<sup>34</sup> Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, cap. 28.

<sup>35</sup> “*Annales Cambriae*” (see n. 19 above), 156; *Annals of Ulster*, ed. W. Hennessey (1887), s.a. 587; “Annals of Tigernach”, *Revue Celtique*, xvii (1896), 157.

<sup>36</sup> *Breviarium Aberdonense* (Edinburgh, 1854), Pars Hiemalis, 11 March.

<sup>37</sup> *Felire Oengusso: the Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, ed. W. Stokes (Henry Bradshaw Society, xxix, 1905), 81, 92-97.

<sup>38</sup> Jocelin, *Vita Kentigerni*, 219.

<sup>39</sup> The genealogy of Rhydderch Hael in Harleian MS 3859 ends with him, while the ancestors of Rhun map Arthgal are carried down to the late ninth century. See n. 19 above.

<sup>40</sup> *Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis*, 1ff.



A late tradition, recounted in the *Aberdeen Breviary*, states that Constantine was martyred in Kintyre.<sup>41</sup> There is a dedication to him at Kilchousland, presumably from Gaelic *Cill Chostantín*.<sup>42</sup> It is probably true, as has been observed, that "the dedication suggested the tale", but it does indicate the presence of the cult of a saint of this name in Kintyre in the early Christian period.<sup>43</sup> Radford has made the ingenious suggestion that there could have been a translation of relics of St Constantine from an exposed coastal site open to Viking attack to an inland site sometime in the ninth century, such as happened with the relics of St Columba.<sup>44</sup> The monks of Iona built a new monastery at Kells in central Ireland in 807, and in 849 the relics of St Columba were divided, with the bulk going to Kells and a part to Dunkeld in Atholl, where Kenneth mac Alpin had built a new church to house them.<sup>45</sup> But we should not view the translation of Columba's relics from Iona to Dunkeld simply as a negative, defensive move on Kenneth's part to escape Viking attack. The reimposition of the cult of the Gaelic saint of Iona in the land of the Picts was a powerful symbolic gesture, an ecclesiastical parallel to the political conquest of the Picts which Kenneth had carried out. In effect, it reversed the rejection of Iona's authority by the Pictish king Nechton son of Derilei c. 715.

Perhaps we should view the rise of Govan and the cult of St Constantine in the same light. It is unlikely that we shall ever establish any historical certainty about the person of this shadowy saint; but we can be fairly certain about where he was honoured and by whom. We have seen that he had a cult centre in Kintyre; and we shall see that he was held in special regard by a Kintyre dynasty.

The first occurrence of the name Constantine in a Scottish regnal list is in the person of the above-mentioned Constantine son of Fergus, king of Picts c. 789-820. It has sometimes been assumed that because he is named as a king of Picts, this name was current among

<sup>41</sup> See n. 36 above.

<sup>42</sup> Watson, *Celtic Place-names*, 188-89, 303.

<sup>43</sup> Radford, "Early Christian Monuments", 186-87; A. Boyle, "Notes on Scottish Saints", *Innes Review*, xxxii (1981), 59-82, s.n. "Constantine".

<sup>44</sup> Radford, "Early Christian Monuments", 188.

<sup>45</sup> M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1973), 249-50. At Dunkeld there is a badly defaced cross-slab of possibly ninth- or tenth-century date. On the obverse it has a cross with cusped arms in relief with Pictish horsemen, a battle scene featuring severed heads, and Daniel in the lions' den; on one side there is another horseman, a saint with nimbus (= St Columba?) and three standing figures (= the Three Children?); on the reverse there is a scene of the multiplication of loaves and fishes and the twelve apostles. The iconography has features in common with that of the granite crosses of Old Kilcullen, Moone, Castledermot and elsewhere in counties Carlow and Kildare in Ireland; at least some of these are ninth century. This stone could have been set up in connection with the translation of Columba's relics to Dunkeld c. 849. Cf. *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, iii, 317-19.

the Picts. But the name Constantine nowhere else occurs in the Pictish king-lists. Indeed it is virtually certain that Constantine son of Fergus was a Gael; Fergus is almost certainly to be identified with Fergus son of Eochaid, a brother of Aed Finn (king of the Dál Riata c. 748-778). Aed Finn claimed descent from the Cenél nGabráin, a dynasty of the Dál Riata based in Kintyre and Knapdale.

Another Scottish king who claimed descent, rightly or wrongly, from the Cenél nGabráin was Kenneth mac Alpin. The name Constantine was frequently used in his family. He had a son (king c. 862-878) who bore it, and also a grandson (king 900-943); the name reappears in the family later in the tenth century, and was still used in the branch of the royal house which became earls of Fife as late as the twelfth century.<sup>46</sup> The name was of such common occurrence in the dynasty of the Scottish kings that on one occasion it appears to have been copied by mistake. The Dalriadic king Domnall mac Constantín, Donald son of Constantine, who was king c. 781-810, is chronologically too early to have been a son of Constantine son of Fergus, king of Picts c. 789-820; he is more likely to have been a son of Aed Finn. Taken with the fact that there is a later king of Scots called Donald son of Constantine (king 889-900), a copyist could easily have misread *Domnall mc aeda fín* as *Domnall m'castatín*.<sup>47</sup> The name Constantine was certainly common enough in the family to allow for such a mistake.

But by far the most significant point to be borne in mind is that the king of Scots at the time of the greatest political upheaval in Strathclyde was himself called Constantine. He was a son of Kenneth, and succeeded his uncle Donald son of Alpin c. 862. In 872, he counselled the death of Arthgal of Dumbarton, who as at the time held captive by the Vikings of Dublin. His sister was married to Arthgal's son Rhun. Constantine died (and possibly Rhun with him) fighting against "Danes" c. 878, two years after the same band of "Danes" had campaigned in central Scotland. This is nearly the sum of our knowledge about Constantine mac Kenneth, but it is sufficient to show that he was instrumental in bringing Strathclyde, at least for a period, within the political orbit of the kings of Scots. It must be significant that the new church founded on the banks of the Clyde about the same time, as a rival or supplanter of the church of St Kentigern, was dedicated to the saint whose name he bore. It might not be too far-fetched to see the church at Govan as his memorial, founded either by himself c.

<sup>46</sup> For the names of Scottish kings, see esp. Anderson, *Early Sources*, i, *passim*; for Constantine Earl of Fife, see A. C. Lawrie, *Early Scottish Charters prior to AD 1153* (Glasgow, 1905), no. 80 and *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> The references are in Anderson, *Early Sources*; for an alternative interpretation, see A. A. M. Duncan, *Scotland: the Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), 55.

872-878 or by his son Donald mac Constantine 889-900. It is this connection which is the true significance of the dedication to St Constantine, rather than any historical reality which may lie behind that shadowy saint.

Further evidence for the overlaying of Strathclyde by Gaelic culture can be sought in other dedications and place-name evidence. Relatively few place-names survive in Strathclyde from pre-Gaelic times. Partick, a former royal residence<sup>48</sup> which was closely associated with Govan in twelfth-century documents, seems to incorporate British *pert*, a copse; Glasgow is *glas* + *caw*, "green hollow"; Lanark, Barlanark, and perhaps Balornock include *lanerc*, a clearing; Fintry in Strathendrick is *venn* + *tref*, "white house". Some early names have an ecclesiastical significance: Eaglesham and Egglesmalessok (in Carluke) contain *ecles*, a church, from Latin *ecclesia*; Paisley, the medieval *Passelet*, seems to be a corruption of late Latin *basilica*.

Many more names have been Gaelicised or overlaid by new Gaelic names. This can be clearly seen in the name of Dumbarton itself. Its earliest British form appears to have been *Alt Clut*, "high cliff of the Clyde",<sup>49</sup> later Gaelicised as *Ail Cluaide*, "rock of the Clyde", and finally supplanted by *Dún Bretann*, "fort of the Britons" — clearly not a name which the Britons would themselves have applied to the place.

The name most clearly associated with Gaelic ecclesiastical developments is of course *cill*, church. Nicolaisen is of the opinion that this was one of the earliest Gaelic names to spread beyond the original Gaelic heartland, probably in the ninth century; but the view that most of these *Kil*- names are not much younger than c. 800 may need some modification with regard to Strathclyde, where the political takeover by the Gaels began about a generation later than it did in Pictland, and where it may not have been an uninterrupted process.<sup>50</sup> The element has a good number of examples in the area: Kilwinning, Kilmarnock, Kilmaurs and West Kilbride in north Ayrshire; Kilbirnie, Kilbarchan, Kilmacolm and Kilellan in Renfrewshire; Kilcreggan, Kilmahew, Killoetar, Kilpatrick, Kilmarnock and Kilbride in Dunbartonshire; Killearn and Kilsyth in south-west Stirlingshire; and East Kilbride in Lanarkshire. This list is not intended to be comprehensive. If these names represent a substantial gaelicisation of the church in Strathclyde, they are unlikely to belong much earlier than the later ninth century. Only two or three of them are sites where Govan school carvings have been found.

<sup>48</sup> Macquarrie, "Career of St Kentigern", 18.

<sup>49</sup> K. H. Jackson, "Bede's *Urbs Gudi*: Stirling or Cramond?", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, ii (1981), 1-8, at 1.

<sup>50</sup> W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-names* (London, 1976), 142-44.



One of these is Old Kilpatrick, from which comes a typical Govan school cross-shaft; the “Mountblow” cross-shaft now in the Glasgow Art Gallery probably came originally from Old Kilpatrick as well.<sup>51</sup> This is the place identified as the birthplace of St Patrick in late ninth-century Irish hagiography, which may only indicate that the dedication existed before the writing of the *Vita Tripartita* c. 900.<sup>52</sup> Another important dedication to an Irish saint, though not a *cill* name, is at Inchinnan, dedicated to St Conval; later tradition has him floating across the sea on a millstone to work as a missionary in Britain.<sup>53</sup> As well as Inchinnan, “his dedications are mostly in Renfrewshire, and stretch as far south as Irvine in Ayrshire”.<sup>54</sup> The earliest source which mentions that Conval was a disciple of Kentigern is, it seems, Fordun; he states that Conval was buried at Inchinnan near Glasgow in a passage in which he also mentions that Kentigern was a contemporary of St Columba, was buried at Glasgow, and that his diocese stretched as far south as Stainmocr Common.<sup>55</sup> Since Fordun’s information about Conval comes in a passage which is mostly about St Kentigern, Glasgow Cathedral, and the original extent of Glasgow diocese, it is likely that he is here drawing on a *Life of Kentigern* of Glasgow provenance. The quotation does not come from Jocelin’s *Vita Kentigerni*, but Fordun does elsewhere acknowledge use of an *Historia Beati Kentigerni* which is clearly the now fragmentary *Life* drawn up at the request of Bishop Herbert c. 1150.<sup>56</sup> So Fordun may have had access to a part of that *Life* which is now lost. If this was, as it appears to be, another late and unconvincing attempt to claim a nearby kirk as part of Glasgow’s *paruchia* on the supposed grounds that its patron saint had been a disciple of Kentigern’s, it was unsuccessful. King David gave the kirk of Inchinnan to the Knights Templars; and Walter the Steward gave the rest of the kirks of Strathgryfe (formerly Inchinnan’s *paruchia*?) to Paisley Abbey.<sup>57</sup>

Paisley’s history may be closer to that of Glasgow than to those of Govan or Inchinnan. Its name, from late Latin *basilica*, presumably had an ecclesiastical significance, since this word was used for a church mostly “in the centuries immediately following the recognition of Christianity by [the emperor] Constantine”.<sup>58</sup> Like

<sup>51</sup> Described and illustrated in *ECMS*, iii; see n. 4 above.

<sup>52</sup> *Tripartite Life of St Patrick*, 8; see n. 33 above.

<sup>53</sup> *Breviarium Aberdonense*, Pars Estivalis, 28 September.

<sup>54</sup> Boyle, “Notes on Scottish Saints”, 74.

<sup>55</sup> *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scottorum*, ed. W. F. Skene (Historians of Scotland, i, Edinburgh, 1871), 115; Macquarrie, “Career of St Kentigern”, 13.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> G. W. S. Barrow, *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, i (Edinburgh, 1960), no. 82; *Registrum Monasterii de Passelet* (Edinburgh, 1832), 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (2nd edn., Oxford, 1974), s.v. *Basilica*.

Glasgow, Paisley does not have early Christian stones (the Barochan Cross now housed in the nave is a recent arrival), but does have a dedication to an early and obscure saint, in this case St Mirin or Mirren. The *Aberdeen Breviary* has an account of his life which states that he was a disciple of St Comgall of Bangor, and which has certain similarities to a Hiberno-Latin *Life of Comgall*. So it has been tentatively suggested that Paisley could have belonged, like Applecross, to the *paruchia* of Bangor.<sup>59</sup> Wherever St Mirin came from, we should probably believe that Paisley was a church founded during the British kingdom, before the coming of Gaelic political domination. Like Glasgow it passed through an obscure phase before being revived by Walter fitz Alan in the mid-twelfth century, when he moved his newly founded monastery from his burgh at Renfrew to Paisley, to be a home for Cluniac monks.<sup>60</sup> Possibly the ascendancy of Inchinnan as head of the kirks in Strathgryfe coincided with the decline of Paisley, in the same way that something similar seems to have happened involving Govan and Glasgow.

Another place that is associated with Kentigern is Cadzow (= Hamilton). The barren wife of Rhydderch Hael, called Languoreth by Jocelin, is called *regina de Cadyhow* in the *Aberdeen Breviary*.<sup>61</sup> Cadzow was certainly royal land in the twelfth century, when King David gave the kirk to the bishops of Glasgow (the parsonage later formed a prebend for the deanery of Glasgow), and it was probably so much earlier. There is a rather late and debased cross, displayed now at Hamilton Old Kirk, which indicates a religious centre of some kind; but Jocelin's and other surviving accounts do not in this case read like "church-bagging" by Glasgow.

The whole question of dedications and place-names is a complex one which is at present the subject of fresh research. So any comments on those subjects must be at best tentative and incomplete pending the appearance of work which is presently being undertaken in this field.

In conclusion, the following points should be stressed. There is general agreement that the stones at Govan and elsewhere in Strathclyde are late in date, belonging mostly to the tenth and eleventh centuries, with a few being perhaps slightly earlier and later. Stylistically they represent a fusion of influences, Gaelic, Anglian, Norse and Pictish. In historical terms, they start at a period when the British kingdom of Dumbarton was losing its independence, at least temporarily, in the face of the advances of the dynasty of

<sup>59</sup> Boyle, "Notes on Scottish Saints", 73.

<sup>60</sup> *Registrum Monasterii de Passelet, passim*.

<sup>61</sup> *Breviarium Aberdonense, Pars Hiemalis*, 13 January; Macquarrie, "Career of St Kentigern", 16.

Kenneth mac Alpin. That dynasty, claiming descent from the Cenél nGabráin of Kintyre, showed a special devotion to St Constantine, who had a cult centre in Kintyre. The name Constantine recurs among them, including most crucially the person who was king of Scots in the 870s. We should probably accept Radford's suggestion of a translation of Constantine's relics from Kilchousland in Kintyre to Govan in the late ninth century; but we should view this not merely as a defensive move in the face of Viking attack, but as an assertion of political and ecclesiastical mastery, like the translation of Columba's relics to Dunkeld a generation earlier. This mastery may not have been uninterrupted from this time throughout the tenth century, but in cultural terms Gaelic seems to have become predominant and the Govan stonecarving school has a long life. It is in the light of these political and ecclesiastical developments that we should view the flowering of this fertile and productive school of early Christian art in Scotland.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> I am grateful to Professor A. A. M. Duncan and to Mr C. P. Wormald for their comments on early drafts of this paper, by which it has been greatly improved. I am alone responsible for errors which remain in spite of their efforts.



